

Travis Unified School District Emergency Safety Plans 2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury

Reason for Investigation

The 2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury chose to investigate the Emergency Safety Plans for selected schools and the Transportation Department within the Travis Unified School District. This investigation stems from concerns regarding the safety and security of students in the event of an emergency while at school or being transported to and from school.

Grand Jury Actions

- Interviewed the Superintendent of Schools for the Travis Unified School District
- Reviewed Emergency Safety Plans for three schools
- Reviewed relevant portions of the California Education Code; California Code of Regulation, Title 5 (Education); “National Electrical Code” and “California Fire Code”
- Interviewed the principals, staff and toured the schools
- Interviewed the transportation supervisor and staff and toured the bus staging area

Background/Summary

Travis Unified School District (District) serves a culturally and ethnically diverse community, which is growing and changing. Approximately 4,860 students are currently enrolled in the District. It has five elementary schools (K-6), one middle school (7-8) and a high school (9-12). The District also has a continuation school and an adult education program.

All schools within the District include the education of special needs students as part of a “collaborative education” model with the Solano County Office of Education.

Many students in the District are children of Travis Air Force Base military personnel. This unique military component impacts schools within the District with a loss of \$3,000 per year per student funding when a student moves from the District.

The Grand Jury visited the following schools in the District to review their Emergency Safety Plans:

Foxboro Elementary School – This school has approximately 700 students in attendance. The staff meets monthly with other schools and the District Administrator to review the Emergency Safety Plan. The current plan was approved in February 2007. Parents, local police officers, and school staff collaborate on the safety plan procedures. New teachers and staff members review and are given a copy of the safety plan. Emergency drills for fire, earthquake and intruder (lockdown) are scheduled and unscheduled.

Some school staff has participated in the Vacaville Citizen Emergency Response Training (VCERT).

Emergency response procedures, which include evacuation of the student population, are posted in each classroom for current and substitute teachers. Communications by the bell, intercom system, e-mail and two-way radio system are used in emergency situations.

The Grand Jury determined that the staff and teachers feel prepared to handle school emergencies and provide student safety. The Principal believes there is good communication between members of the faculty and staff.

The following observations and areas of concern were noted by the Grand Jury during our tour:

- The parking lot configuration poses a safety hazard during the arrival and departure of students
- The crosswalk at the school entrance should be painted
- There was no fence between the public park and the school
- Electrical extension cords were used in place of permanent wiring

Golden West Middle School - Student enrollment is approximately 830, which includes eight special needs students that are mentally or physically challenged. Golden West Middle School is situated in a potentially dangerous location. A chemical plant is located in an industrial park nearby. Trains carrying hazardous material pass near the school daily.

The Assistant Principal chairs the safety committee that reviews the plan each year. New teachers, new substitute and transferred teachers attend an orientation which includes review of the safety plan procedures. Four of the school's staff attended VCERT training last fall and the safety committee has solicited ideas from Vanden High School for more safety tips. The safety committee's last formal meeting was fall 2006. The committee plans to resume regular scheduled meetings which will include students.

Emergency drills are announced in advance at the beginning of the school year. These drills are documented and ways to improve them are discussed. Additional drills are unannounced.

The school recently went into lock-down mode due to a hazardous material leak inside the nearby chemical plant. Fairfield Police Department contacted the school and suggested lock-down. The secretary e-mailed all classrooms and the Principal and Assistant Principal visited each class and explained the situation.

The counseling office is the designated secondary command center if the main office becomes inaccessible. In case of evacuation, the multipurpose room is the primary location with Vanden High stadium being the second. The school is working with the Transportation Department if evacuation requires busses. The school uses the Connect Ed system, which immediately notifies parents/guardians of any occurrence and subsequent actions taken by the school.

Each classroom is equipped with an emergency packet that includes a student roster and signs that read "OK", "Need Help", etc. The school depends heavily on e-mail to disseminate information and two-way radios in the event of a power failure. Fire alarm pull stations are visible in most classrooms. The school is looking into installing more lift covers to curtail false alarms. The ceiling smoke detectors are very sensitive and activate easily; for example, while heating and ventilation ducts are cleaned and escaping fumes from science experiments, etc. In the event of prolonged lock-down, the school's cafeteria has approximately 30 cases of water,

some Gatorade and a cache of food. It is not equipped to handle emergencies requiring extended stay.

The following observations and areas of concern were noted by the Grand Jury during our tour:

- The benches in B Quad need resurfacing and painting, some have raised bolts
- There is cracked pavement in traffic areas
- The basketball and volleyball area needs resurfacing
- Outside PE classes are unable to distinguish the type of drill or emergency
- A lack of computers or public address system on the stage in multipurpose room
- There are no students on the school's safety committee

Vanden High School - Vanden High School has an enrollment of approximately 1,550 and is located on 47 acres, with 60 classrooms. The modernization of the current classrooms was started in 2005. Construction began in 2006 on new classrooms, and improvements are being made to accommodate growth. Upon completion, a new visual arts center and 24 new classrooms will be added replacing approximately 17 portable units. Night security will be improved with the addition of new outside lighting.

The Emergency Safety Plan is very well organized and documented. The Principal is the incident commander in any emergency. The Assistant Principal performs this role when the Principal is not on campus. The school's plan includes a list of key personnel designated to perform emergency functions. These functions may include first aid/medical, search and rescue, communications and the assembly area. A backup person is designated for each assignment.

The Assistant Principal leads an active safety committee which meets monthly and includes four students.

Emergency drills are announced and unannounced. Forms are completed by staff after the drill on the drills' effectiveness. On some occasions, the fire department sends a representative to critique the drill and the safety committee reviews overall results. Subsequently, updates can be made to the Emergency Safety Plan.

In emergencies causing a closed campus continuing beyond normal school hours, food and water is available at the District office adjacent to the school. This happened when roads to the school were flooded and the students and faculty could not leave the campus.

The school was well maintained and clean during our tour.

The Grand Jury observed that there were no covers over many of the fire alarm pull stations at any of the three schools.

Transportation Department - The Travis Unified School District is responsible under the California Education Code, section 39831.3 to prepare a Transportation Department Emergency Safety Plan. The plan must contain procedures to ensure the safe transport of pupils. The Grand Jury was informed that the Transportation Plan for the District met or exceeded the State code requirements.

Twenty school buses provide service for approximately 1800 hundred students' roundtrip from home to school. The District school bus drivers are qualified and trained to operate school buses. After their initial training, drivers are required to have 10 hours of in-service training each year. In November 2006, the District provided new two-way radios for the school buses to better communicate in the event of an emergency.

The following observations and areas of concern were noted by the Grand Jury during our tour:

- Difficulty in maintenance of older school buses, i.e. replacement parts
- Not all drivers are CPR/First Aid certified

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - The basic overall Emergency Safety Plan was not consistent for each school. Variance for school design and geographical location was noted.

Recommendation 1 - Emergency Safety Plans should be consistent throughout the Travis Unified School District. School design and geographical location plans may differ.

Finding 2 - Several fire and electrical code violations were found such as: blocked access to fire alarm pull stations, fire extinguishers and use of temporary extension cords in place of permanent wiring. Some passageways to exits were partially blocked. Some doors to the outside were not marked with an "EXIT" sign.

Recommendation 2 - The Travis Unified School District Superintendent should ask the appropriate fire departments to perform safety inspections.

Finding 3 - Maintenance of older buses is becoming progressively more difficult.

Recommendation 3 - The District should consider purchasing new vehicles to replace the older buses.

Finding 4 - Adequate water and food supplies are not available at some schools in case of prolonged lock-down. Some schools depend on the District Office for water and food during an emergency.

Recommendation 4 – The District should provide an adequate supply of water and food on site.

Finding 5 – Fire alarm pull stations did not have covers.

Recommendation 5 – The District should install covers to prevent false alarms.

Comments

Include student representatives on safety committees at District Schools to provide input from a student's perspective. Increase communication and collaboration between schools in the District during the Emergency Safety planning process.

The Grand Jury was impressed by the cooperation and professionalism of the superintendent and staff during our investigation.

Affected Agencies

- Superintendent of the Travis Unified School District
- Principal of Foxboro Elementary School
- Principal of Golden West Middle School
- Principal of Vanden High School
- Director of Transportation Department
- Travis Unified School District Board

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